

“Fascism” as philosophy

In response to my post of Carneades’ video “[What is fascism?](#)” Paul commented:

Trump is not a fascist.

The definitions provided in the video are not dictionary definitions of fascism, rather a subjective opinion of undefined concepts that one might link to a fascist dictator.



...in the U.S. Congress

The entire presentation is absurd. Saying Trump opposes “Individual freedom” because he nominated anti-abortion Supreme Court justices is the same as saying every single administration is fascist because they nominate Supreme Court justices that uphold the draft or force men to work 18 years paying child support. They are all against individual freedom apparently.

This should be subjected to a proper debate because the video presented is awful.

I will review what [Carneades](#) said about fascism, then make some comments. Carneades wasn’t discussing dictionary definitions of fascism such as this one:

A system of government marked by centralization of authority under a dictator, a capitalist economy subject to stringent governmental controls, violent suppression of the opposition, and typically a policy of belligerent nationalism and racism. (– *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th Edition)

That definition is not coherent enough to be philosophically defensible. An economy that is under strict government control is *not* capitalist.

As explained in his short video essay “[What is fascism?](#)” Carneades’ *philosophical* definition of fascism harks back to the historic figures who invented it, [Giovanni Gentile](#) and [Benito Mussolini](#), early in the 20th Century. This is not necessarily the same notion of fascism invoked when it is used pejoratively to label someone whose politics rubs you the wrong way. In Carneades second video on the topic, “[Fascism and the Unitary Executive](#),” he outlines the principles of *philosophical* fascism (of, at least, Mussolini’s more virulent form):

1. Individuals should be subordinate to the will of the state.

2. Businesses and organizations should be subordinate to the will of the state.
3. Power should be concentrated under a single strong executive. The freedom that is good is the freedom of the executive to impose their will and do whatever they want.
4. Multilateral institutions are bad and should be eliminated.
5. Countries should not support each other, but fight with each other instead.
6. Violence is a good thing, both domestically and internationally.

He then examines how Trump's performance measured up against these principles during his first term and, so far, during his second term. Carneades finds that, though Trump manifests some fascistic tendencies during his first term, not enough to quite separate himself from previous presidents. ([Executive aggrandizement](#) has been a steady development from long before Trump came on the scene.) But so far, in his second term, he seems to be hitting all the bases. So, Carneades concludes, Trump has *now* become a bona fide fascist.

While his argument about Trump's increasing fascistic tendencies makes some sense, I would disagree with Carneades about the second term. Trump *himself* is *still* not a fascist in the *philosophical* sense Carneades is addressing – and probably can't be. I explain below in detail why I think so, but, briefly, it's not that Trump's *behavior* isn't fascistic, something else blocks the attribution... the mentally impaired have great difficulty with the coherent thinking that is required *to perform philosophically* – that is, to hold and defend “a philosophy.” This was as true of Biden as it is of Trump.¹

The reason I posted Carneades' video

Carneades has been involved in philosophical education for the general public from outside academia for a decade or more. He has a lot of company on Youtube these days, but he was one of the first, I believe. I can vouch for his knowing his stuff; the breath of his knowledge of philosophy is rare, I think, even inside academia. He has generally avoided politics, though not political philosophy. (They are not the same.) He is very clearly a [Pyrrhonian Skeptic](#), trying to stay clear of belief systems. He comments on politics and religion but tries to stay removed. Pyrrhonism is a school of philosophy that I, personally, find congenial, though I would not call myself a Pyrrhonist for the very reason that to do so is to skirt very close to having a belief system – *the very thing Pyrrhonism tries to stay aloof from*. I would call it an *aspirational* philosophical stance; it can never truly be an accomplished one. But that is, in essence, its point.

As he warns in the video, he will probably offend people across the political spectrum (as Pyrrho did back in ancient Greece): Trump supporters obviously, but also the established opposition to Trump, mainstream Democrats, who are, in large measure, responsible for Trump. They will be offended, too.

1. Wittgenstein famously claimed that to be *compelled* to philosophize at all is to be mentally impaired. While I agree with Wittgenstein, explaining how so would lead us into a much deeper discussion than is called for here. “A philosopher is a man who has to cure many intellectual diseases in himself before he can arrive at the notions of common sense.” *Culture and Value*, 44e (Winch trans.), 1980.

I didn't learn anything I didn't already know from this video about Trump. As a former historian, it is obvious to me, and most, that Trump has fascistic tendencies, whether or not he started out that way. The really sad part is that the U.S. may *need* a fascist leader to wake up to the dire state of its political system. Such leaders appear near the end of an empire.

What is particularly interesting about Carneades' analysis is where it is coming from. I find almost no one involved in the U.S government, or any government, of whatever political stripe at the policy level very smart; sometimes savvy at manipulation, sometimes not even that, but genuine critical intelligence is scarce. As Diogenes put it, even with a lantern in broad daylight, it is hard to find much honesty in politicized government.

I've known of Carneades for a long time. "Carneades" is a pseudonym. I didn't know exactly why he chose to do philosophy undercover. He had revealed in the past he is or was based in Africa for a long time, but not much beyond that about what he does or who he really is. It turns out, now, he confesses he is a U.S. government employee involved in foreign assistance. A Pyrrhonist is not someone who tows political lines, so it would be best to keep a low profile if you are one, and want to keep a job as a civil servant in a highly politicized atmosphere, even if in a relatively non-political post.

But to a fascist, it's not possible to be nonpolitical. You are with the fascist or you are an enemy. Under duress, whole nations get fascistic quick. I remember George W. Bush in the aftermath of 9/11, declaring "you are either with us or you are against us." This enables a politician to make up stories, WMDs in Iraq, for instance, to justify whatever decision or action they think will fly while people are alarmed. Keeping a nation under duress is important to facilitate authoritarianism. The Democrats under Biden posited "deplorables" as enemies of the state, instead of reaching out to them,² and propped up a mental incompetent to fend off another mental incompetent. 180 or so million US born citizens eligible to run for the Presidency and we get *two* demented leaders in a row...

So Trump is violating every law in the book – national, international, and moral (but who cares about morality except philosophers living in a dream world) by extrajudicially killing fisherman in the waters north of Venezuela. What gave him the idea he could get away with this? We have Barack Obama to thank for [legitimizing the use of drones to kill suspected terrorists](#) in Iraq. Suspicion is all you need these days. If a few innocents die, especially if they are foreigners, so what? Trump is building on Obama's precedent. Nothing happened to Obama. Trump must have figured, he will go one step further. Let's try and risk extrajudicial killing domestically, and see how that goes. The important message to convey is that enemies of the state, "deplorables," "terrorists," etc. – whatever term your political affiliation dictates, real or imagined – don't deserve to live no matter where they were born.

Carneades doesn't hide that part of his motivation for pointing out fascism in the U.S. government out now is that one of his bosses is no longer paying him. As a long time government employee involved in foreign affairs, he is seeing up close who is really shaping domestic and foreign policy. It's actually not Trump. Independently of Carneades view, I don't believe Trump is smart enough to have a coherent

2. Even assuming that the majority of the U.S. voters are *not* Trump supporters, it was evident that *enough* of them were that a truly *democratic* party (with a small "d") should see fit to attend to them.

political philosophy – not now, maybe he never was, but certainly not now. *Trump suffers from Bidenism: incompetence masked by those around you.* Fascism, to be dangerous, requires some competence. Fascism is a real philosophy. You may not agree with it, but, formulated carefully, it is internally coherent. Put crudely, most people don't know their ass from a hole the ground, that's why democracies decline into anarchy. One of the greatest philosophers of all time, Plato, said as much 2500 years ago. The role of the state is to insert some discipline into an otherwise self-destructive chaos. True, Plato would not have favored fascism, not because it was authoritarian but because how the authority acquired authority (and elections by persons ignorant of the coordinates of their ass is not the solution), but his reasoning was, apparently, too subtle for the masses constituted as they were then, and still are, to appreciate.³

No, Trump is not running the show anymore than Biden was. There were, and are, smart people around more capable at manipulating masses. It so happens one of them appears to be Carneades' boss, [Russ Vought](#), political analyst, one the architects of Project 2025, and current head of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The OMB holds the purse strings on government expenditure. Congress may vote to allocate money for whatever it wants, but it won't be spent if the OMB blocks it. *Thus, the OMB can, quite literally, run the whole government show.* Nothing in the Constitution forces the President, Congress, or the Supreme Court to stop the OMB...⁴ How could this happen? And what is the agenda of the OMB? It is spelled out in the almost 900 page manifesto, [Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise](#), put out by a collective of conservative foundations.

Vought had a voice, through the think tank he founded, in shaping the ideas in this manifesto. See, especially, Chapter 2.

Again, *two in a row...*

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hilosophy
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Addendum for [the topic](#) hosted at
[The Philosophy Club](#) in January 2025
Accessible at [Archive.org](#)

– Victor Muñoz
Guanajuato / Seattle

3. In case you wonder what might be done about this, other than complain, see my five part discussion on [“Magical thinking about democracy.”](#) I am not optimistic, but I respect people with more intelligent hope than I can muster. One such is [Alexander Guerrero](#).

4. Corroborating Carneades: See [“Russell Vought: The Shadow President,” ProPublica](#) and [“How Project 2025 Architect Russell Vought Became ‘Shadow President’ Under Trump,” Democracy Now](#), 21 October 2025.